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US, Soviets share evidence on former Nazis; émigrés protest

By Warren Richey

Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

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Almost lost amid superpower posturing over arms control and the Reagan-Gorbachev summit is the extensive behind-the-scenes cooperation between the United States and the Soviet Union on a different issue — tracking down former Nazi war criminals and collaborators living quietly in the US.

American Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, Ukrainians, and other immigrants from Eastern Europe claim the Soviets are using their participation in the

Nazi-hunting effort to harass and discredit anti-Soviet émigrés in the US.

These émigrés, many of whom fled eastern and northern Europe to escape the approaching Red Army in the mid-1940s, say they are facing a new Russian invasion — an invasion of their rights as naturalized US citizens. They add that this new invasion is being carried out with the full cooperation of the Reagan administration's Justice Department.

"The Justice Department is serving the interests of the Soviets by pointing a finger at collaborators and meting out specific revenge against various ethnic groups in the US," says Tony Mazeika, president of the Coalition for Constitutional Justice and Security, an umbrella organization of some 40 émigré and other groups nationwide.

"We feel it is just too serious a matter to take away one's citizenship and deport an individual on evidence that is not corroborated by other sources that are not from the Soviet Union," says Austr Zerr of the Lithuanian American Community of the USA.

Justice Department officials counter that the Soviets have a genuine interest in prosecuting war criminals — noting that the Russians suffered greatly at the hands of the Nazis — and that Soviet animosity toward the émigrés does not necessarily taint the captured German documents in Soviet archives, nor does it automatically undermine the veracity of personal accounts of those who survived or participated in Nazi atrocities.

The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith believes the true aim of the émigrés is to halt US efforts to track down Nazi war criminals. A B'nai B'rith report calls the émigrés' concerns "a propaganda smoke screen that seeks to exploit anticommunism and US-Soviet tensions."

The central issue in this debate is the extent to which the US Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations (OSI) should rely on evidence from the Soviet Union in cases against persons accused of collaborating in Nazi war crimes.

OSI officials assert that there is no evidence the Soviets have falsified docu-

ments or influenced Soviet citizens to give untruthful testimony. They also note that West German courts have accepted Soviet evidence for 20 years.

"There isn't a single document that we have received, at least as of today, that has not been authentic," says Michael Wolf, deputy director of OSI. "We analyze absolutely everything they give us."

The Soviets, as part of an informal 1980 agreement, are supplying US prosecutors with evidence to help the Justice Department strip accused Nazi collaborators of their US citizenship and, in some cases, deport them to the Soviet Union.

Under US laws, the defendants are not tried for their alleged participation in Nazi war crimes. Rather, the cases hinge on whether the defendants lied to US officials about their activities during the war in order to gain visas to enter the country.

Since 1979 the OSI has opened some 900 case files of suspected Nazi collaborators. These efforts have resulted in 18 denaturalization orders and 15 deportation orders (or agreements that the defendant will leave the country voluntarily). Eight defendants have actually left the US. At present, 28 cases are pending in US courts. Most of them involve émigrés from Soviet-occupied territories.

"We shouldn't be surprised if we find that the Soviets are using this as an avenue for other political objectives," says Richard H. Shultz, an expert in Soviet disinformation efforts and an associate professor at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. He adds, "I really have great suspicions when it comes to this kind of evidence. I think that any material that we take from the Soviet Union needs to be looked at in a very careful way. I wouldn't take it at face value."

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